

PERRY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PERRY COUNTY, BITS AND PIECES

No. 1

by

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The Perry County Historical Society was organized to search out, collect and share any information, both verbal and written; to aid in compiling a factual history of our county in any and all facets of it's development.

The society is a non-profit organization depending on member support and donations. New members are always sought and any historically interested persons are always welcome.

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Hopefully, this is the first in a series of pamphlets which will give an interesting, sometimes amusing view of the "good old days."

PERRY COUNTY-BITS AND PIECES

Perry County, named for Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, was created on February 19, 1827. A man named Cox and his family were credited with being the first white settlers of the area in 1795. However, John Flack and family, who settled on Four Mile Prairie, became the first permanent settlers when Cox moved away. B. A. Brown and family settled on Six Mile Prairie. John Hutchings and family settled on Hutchings Prairie. There was also a slave, Landon Park and his wife, Agis. Joshua M. Rice arrived in 1829 for a one year stay. Jeremiah Dennis arrived in 1830, Jacob Walker and Campbell Stuart in 1831, James Meadows in 1833.

Jerrold Jackson moved into the Old Du Quoin area to become it's first white resident in 1803. He had a ferry to assist the travelers from Kaskaskia to Shawneetown. Lewis Wells and Thomas Taylor came in 1812. John Campbell and five sons came the same year. Ephriam Skinner and Hiram Root came in 1816 and Benjamin Brown in 1817. Abner, John and William Pyle came in 1819. Daniel Dry and his wife walked from Pennsylvania with their belongings in a cart made from a barrel. Dry had the first store in Old Du Quoin. His store license of 1831 cost \$5.00.

John Huggins settled in 1802 in the Cutler area. Enoch Eaton and family came from Tennessee in 1825 in a horse drawn wagon. Later his father and family came in a bull drawn cart.

Tamaroa's first settlers were a family named Rees in 1815. A family named Foster arrived in 1825, Nathan Curlee and Abe Morgan in 1828.

Shadrach Lively settled on Holt's Prairie in 1822. Humphrey

Jones had moved from Kentucky to Jackson County in 1821 and in 1827 moved into Perry County near a Pinckneyville spring. Simon Willard settled in the southwest precinct in 1817, also Benjamin Brown.

Thomas Swanwick settled in the Grand Cote precinct in 1819, William P. Elliott in 1820. David Dial and family appear to be the first settlers of Paradise Prairie in 1827. William Jones bought land in 1827 from Alexander Clark. James Jones and family came in 1828. Thomas Jones and West Eaton and families came in an ox drawn wagon the next year.

The winter of 1830-31, which was later called "the winter of the deep snow" must have made many settlers wish they had stayed in their home states. Snow began near Christmas and fell almost each day for nine weeks for a total of about three feet of snow, topped off by a layer of sleet.

The first commissioners of Perry County, Samuel Crawford, Edward Humphreys and Singleton Kimmel met at Amos Anderson's home to choose a county seat. They agreed to acquire twenty acres and lay out lots to create Pinckneyville. Dr. Brayshaw rode horseback to Vandalia to protest the legality of the election. On June 4, 1827, David Mead, John R. Hutchings and Elijah Wells were sworn in as county commissioners and the business of creating a county began. Taxes were set at one third percent on all Pinckneyville lots, horses, cattle, slaves, bank stock, pleasure carriages, distilleries, watches, chains and fobs.

Costs were set up for public houses and taverns. Lodging for the night was $6\frac{1}{4}$ cents; to keep a horse overnight was $37\frac{1}{2}$ cents; to feed a horse was $12\frac{1}{2}$ cents; dinner for a lodger was

25 cents, while breakfast or supper could be had for 18½ cents.

A half pint of whiskey was 12½ cents.

Taxes collected for the year of 1827 were \$74.11, yet a log courthouse was completed in 1828, costing 54.00.

The population of Illinois in 1830 was 157,445 and of this 1,215 were in Perry County. By 1880, Illinois population had risen to 3,078,636 and Perry County to 16,008.

The city of Du Quoin evolved from Old Du Quoin, which had it's beginning at the Indian camp of Chief Jean Baptiste Decoigne. As early settlers began to trickle into the state, some built their cabins near the friendly Indians. Names such as Smith, Sprague, Skinner, Frazier, and Hinckley began to appear. Some had traveled the Ohio river, then by wagon or cart to the area. Others made unbelievable journeys from the eastern states, all on foot, carrying or pulling their belongings.

Talk of a railway from "the Lakes to the Gulf" began in the 1840's. Every other section of land along the route was donated by the states to the railroad. In return for this, the railroad was to give seven percent of the yearly income to the states involved.

Old Du Quoin was a thriving settlement in 1852 and began plans for a female seminary and on June 13, 1855 the cornerstone was laid on a beautiful hill overlooking the farms in the valleys. By 1890, the Seminary was discontinued and the building was purchased by George Blakeslee for a summer home. It later sold to the Children's Home and in 1903, after being empty for two years, it burned to the ground.

After the railroad was completed, people from the Old Du Quoin area began to move to the "station", which became the hub of activity.

In September, 1853, William Richart made the original survey of Du Quoin. Bargella Silkwood purchased the first lot, number 45, at the southwest corner of Keyes Park. There were only about forty acres originally in the survey. However, wide streets were planned. Main and Washington were 100 feet wide. Residents planted trees and these soon created beautifully shaded avenues. A fine city park of over six acres was donated by the founder of Du Quoin, Chester A. Keyes. The city records show a quit claim deed in 1893-consideration of \$300.00.

Brick by the thousands were made in the area for stores, churches, sidewalks, coal mines and chimneys.

There was a bumper crop of peaches in 1867 which helped put our area "on the map". For years this was a prime source of peaches, with trucks coming from Minnesota and Nebraska.

Mines had sprung up early in the areas history and for years coal was produced from Du Quoin. The first shaft mine in the state was Middle Mine. Later Blakeslee Manufacturing Company was built at this site.

The Southern Illinois Soldiers and Sailors Reunion Grounds were once located at the Marshall Browning site. There was a street car line with horse drawn cars to handle the reunion crowds. Cars ran every fifteen minutes. When the line was discontinued one of the cars was moved to Pinckneyville and was used as a restaurant on South Walnut street.

In 1870, the District Fair Association purchased forty acres from Harvey McElvain and building was begun on a large racetrack and many buildings. In 1871, it achieved State Fair status, but only for that year. The venture was not a financial success and in a few years it was only a memory.

The Blakeslee Manufacturing Company, organized in 1862, occupied the corner of Washington and Poplar, where the old high school was once located. Here, the Blakeslee Steam Jet Pump was invented. These pumps have been sold worldwide. Later, the company moved to West North and Chestnut Street.

The first newspaper in Perry County was the Perry County Times, published in Pinckneyville, October, 1856. The second newspaper was the Du Quoin Mining Journal of August, 1858. At one time it drew the ire of a group of soldiers, who broke into the office and threw the type in the street.

The Du Quoin Bottling Works was begun by two Hayes brothers, Thomas and Edwin. Edwin left the company and after the death of Thomas, his widow, Mary, carried on. A son, William, delivered products with a push cart. Eventually, in 1926, it was taken over by Midwest Dairy Products.

In 1897, Frank Schleper, Sr. purchased the first block of artificial ice produced in Du Quoin. The 100 pound block sold for \$5.00 at auction. Other blocks went for \$3.00 and \$1.00.

The manufacture of salt began in 1873 and for about 25 years salt provided many jobs and much income for the area.

Du Quoin in 1869 contained many businesses. Among them was eight coal mines, a brewery, a distillery, a foundry, four steam

mills, four millinery stores, seventeen dry goods stores, three groceries, five butcher shops, two slaughter houses, five wagon and buggy makers, two bakeries, two print shops, three hotels, three livery stables, two jewelers, two lumber yards, a planing mill, four boot and shoe shops, two hardware stores, two book stores, a saddlery and six blacksmith shops.

Plans for a packinghouse began in 1872 with lots being purchased near the old Keyes and Metcalf mine.

The county approached the 1900's full of the energy and zest which the early settlers had brought with them. Hopefully, this same zest will remain into the 2000's.

